



VIII THE ETRUSCAN PROBLEM

An historic people who left no history

DONALD STRONG

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BC	Central and Northern Italy occupied by iron-using people (Villanovans) practising cremation		
800			
	Early occupation of Etruscan sites	753 Traditional date for the founding of Rome	733 Founding of Greek colony at Syracuse
700			
	Earliest inhumation graves	Foreign imports from Egypt, Assyria and Phoenicia	
	Development of Etruscan sea-power	c. 650 Earliest inscriptions in the Etruscan language	
	Rise of city-states: Tarquinia, Caere, Chiusi, Vulci, etc.	Regolini-Galassi tomb at Caere	
600			
	Zenith of Etruscan power	Development of Etruscan art under Greek influence	
	c. 550 Tomb of the Bulls, Tarquinia	Etruscan expansion in Po valley	
500			
	Finest painted tombs at Tarquinia, Apollo of Veii		535 Sea battle of Alalia
	474 Etruscan and Carthaginian fleet defeated by the Greeks at Cumae		490 Battle of Marathon
	Rome and Campania lost to Etruscans (fall of Capua 443)	Gauls invade N. Italy	
400			
	396 Fall of Veii to the Romans		415 Athenian expedition to Sicily
		c. 350 Caere and Tarquinia under Roman rule	
300			
	281 Fall of Vulci, last Etruscan city to be taken by the Romans		336 Accession of Alexander the Great

The main phases and events of Etruscan history are shown in this chronological table, with contemporary Greek activity on the right.

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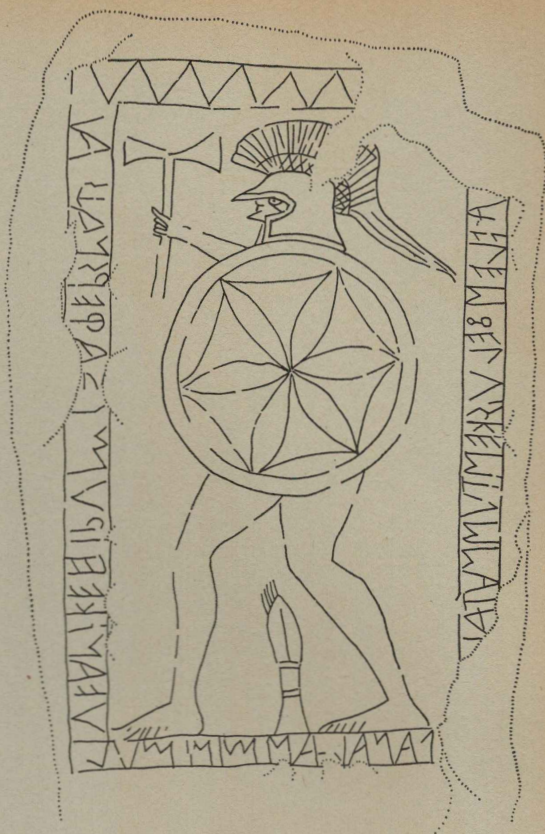
THE PEOPLE we call Etruscans inhabited central Italy in the time of the Greeks and Romans; they belong, therefore, to history but they have left us no history themselves. None of the most vivid aspects of written history—the names and deeds of famous men, accounts of wars and revolutions—are known direct from Etruscan sources. From Greek and Roman writers we get a picture of the cruel and licentious Etruscan that does him far less than justice and is born of misunderstanding and political rivalry. The disease of Etruscomania—the romantic enthusiasm for all things Etruscan—which has had its victims from the Emperor Claudius to D. H. Lawrence, has done him scarcely less harm. Etruscan archaeology is still young and many of the key sites were carelessly, sometimes ruthlessly, excavated in its very early days. Nor can archaeology alone succeed in answering many of the questions which are bound to be asked about a people who were contemporaries of the fully historical Greeks and Romans.

The Etruscans, indeed, ever since the Renaissance, have been enveloped in an aura of mystery. Their cities are still largely unexplored and are often scenes of that romantic and picturesque desolation which inspires the nostalgia of vanished glories while their tomb-paintings, at Tarquinia and elsewhere, seem to recreate the life of the people with an almost overpowering immediacy. Add to all this a language about which we know very little, conflicting accounts, ancient and modern, of their origins, and the Etruscans remain as satisfyingly enigmatic as any people who have inhabited the face of the earth.

The Etruscans, who called themselves Rasna and were known to the Greeks as Tyrrhenians, inhabited part of central Italy on the western side of the Apennine range, a territory bounded on the north by the river Arno, on the east and south by the river Tiber, and on the west by the Tyrrhenian sea. It is a land of variety and picturesque landscape, endowed with rich natural resources. In the north a broad range of hilly country extends eastwards from the sea to the fertile valleys and mountains below the high Apennines; in the south the coastal tract of the Maremma rises up to a zone of fertile volcanic uplands cut by deep ravines and surrounding extinct craters like Lago di Bolsena and Lago di Vico. Olives, grape-vines, cereals and fruit grow in abundance. Besides, Etruria contained almost all the mineral resources of the Italian peninsula and several of the Etruscan cities, Populonia for example, owed their prosperity to this mineral wealth; but those of the south depended mainly on intensive and highly successful cultivation of the fruitful soil and they included the most important and rapidly developing of all.

Before the Etruscans

In this area, richly endowed by nature, archaeology has traced the development, sometime during the 8th century BC, of a material culture distinct from the rest of the Italian peninsula. A rapid accession of wealth accompanied by new and lavish burial customs is found in several centres which later became famous in history as Etruscan cities. In the 7th century foreign ideas and foreign products imported from all over the Mediterranean reflect a vast rise in the standard of living. There are inscriptions in

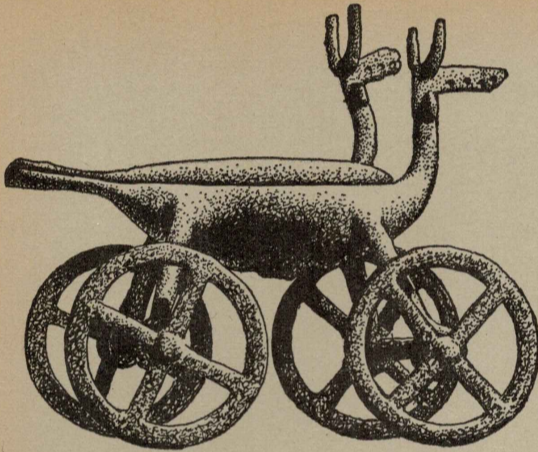


One of the earliest inscriptions in the Etruscan language, dated about 650 BC. It is on a stele found at Vetulonia, of an Etruscan warrior named Avele Feluske who is armed with a double-axe. (1)

the Etruscan language as early as about 650 BC, perhaps earlier, and by about 600 BC, we can speak of a fully-developed Etruscan people. This 'orientalising' period of the 7th century BC, so called because of the predominance of imports from the eastern Mediterranean area, was obviously the decisive step in the development of the people we know as Etruscans.

It seems, however, that an equally decisive step was taken much earlier in central Italy when iron-using peoples settled on most of the sites that were later to become Etruscan cities. We should perhaps admit that many of these same centres had indeed been occupied continuously since late Bronze Age times, but the iron-users, who are called Villanovans, a name they take from the site of Villanova near Bologna, however much they may have assimilated of the Apennine Bronze Age culture must be reckoned an intrusive people closely connected with the urn-field cultures across the eastern Alps. These people buried their dead in cylindrical funerary shafts set close together, the ashes being interred in a characteristic ossuary, the biconical urn. Helmet-urns and hut-urns, the germ perhaps of the later Etruscan idea that the tomb should copy the house of the living, are also found in several places. The typical contents of a rich Villanovan grave, such as have been found at Tarquinia, include finely-made bronze armour, bronze articles of dress, and metal vessels with incised ornament.

These Villanovans cannot, on any interpretation of the archaeological evidence, be dissociated from the Etruscans of history; one of the main centres of Villanovan development was the coastal region of southern Etruria—the area of Tarquinia and Caere (Cerveteri)—where they were already exploiting the local



Bronze container from a Villanovan grave at Tarquinia, 7th century BC. The vessel, on four wheels, is in the form of a bird's body ending in a long neck with stag's head. The lid has a similar neck and head. (2)

sources of mineral ore. Indeed, it can be argued that in many places the Villanovan 'shades off' into Etruscan with the influx of material wealth and foreign imports, bringing with them, inevitably, new ideas and customs. Everything depends, obviously, on a correct assessment of what took place and it will be well to begin by looking at a few of the subsequently important Etruscan places to assess the character of the change, the process and timing of which is never exactly the same in two places.

The Birth of the New Culture

f 11 We may take first Tarquinia which was to become one of the most renowned of Etruscan cities. It lay, some five miles from the sea, on a long, narrow plateau attached to a mountain chain, a classic South Etruscan site. The area of the town, known today as Piano di Civit , was probably occupied from early Villanovan times and was surrounded by extensive cemeteries, the earliest being the Selciatello, the largest the Monterozzi. In the oldest tombs, the ashes of the dead were placed in the characteristic biconical urns, of clay and later of metal, often covered with bronze helmets; here as elsewhere some hut-urns have been found which are copied, no doubt, from the contemporary dwellings of the people.

About 700 the earliest inhumation graves seem to occur and one of the larger among them is the so-called Bocchoris Tomb, which takes its name from the vase of Egyptian faience with a cartouche of the king Bakenrenef who reigned in Egypt between 734 and 728. Other 'oriental' imports in this tomb include faience figures and fragments of faience vases, pottery stands of Urartian type, an Assyrian gold plaque, some locally made jewellery and imitations of Greek vases. A second inhumation of about the same date, the so-called 'Tomba del Guerriero', was made in a simple sarcophagus; the contents were mainly of Villanovan type but with imitations of Greek pottery and one object of precious metal. In the course of the 7th century inhumation generally took the place of cremation but the large chamber-tomb did not come in until the 6th century.

Caere, our second Etruscan city, lies about four and a half miles from the sea with its principal port at Pyrgi, some eight miles away; its wealth, from an early period, seems to have derived from the minerals of the La Tolfa-Allumiere region. Here the Villanovan Iron Age was transformed about the middle of the 7th century with a fabulously rich 'orientalising' phase. The famous Regolini-Galassi tomb is a long tunnel with side tunnels cut in the native tufa and roofed over with a false vault on the same principle as the Mycenaean tholos tombs; it contained

three principal burials with grave-goods of regal splendour including eastern cauldrons, gold and silver vessels of 'Phoenician' make, ivory carvings in oriental and 'orientalising' styles, Corinthian vases and much magnificent gold jewellery. Both the monumental form of the tomb and the wealth of its contents introduce a vast contrast with the preceding Villanovan phase.

In the north, Vetulonia and Chiusi may serve to illustrate contrasting developments in Etruscan cities. At Vetulonia the oldest Villanovan tombs are rather poorer than elsewhere; the later cremations are found grouped in rough stone circles and about 700 BC, it seems, a formal circle of upright slabs was arranged around groups of mainly inhumation tombs containing rich 'orientalising' grave goods of bronze, jewellery etc. Monumental tombs appear at the end of the 7th century. In Chiusi, the most important Etruscan city of the north in historical times, there was a large Villanovan settlement and the rite of cremation lasted much longer than elsewhere. There are two characteristic local forms of burial; in one, the so-called burial 'a ziro', the ash-urn is placed in another, larger vessel, and in the other, the vessel is shaped in imitation of the human body and has a lid in the form of a head, the so-called 'canopic' jar. Prosperity seems to have come to Chiusi at the end of the 7th century with chamber tombs and imports from abroad as well as from the coastal Etruscan cities.

Who Were the Etruscans?

In the course of these developments during the 8th and 7th centuries BC, the historical Etruscans had appeared. The 'far-famed Tyrrhenians' are mentioned in Hesiod's *Theogony* dating from about 700 BC and it is arguable that as early as 750, when the Greeks were beginning to colonize the southern parts of Italy, the centre of the peninsula was already controlled by the Etruscans, who were strong enough to discourage the Greeks from attempting to settle further north and induce them to accept instead the rich market for their pottery, oil, perfume etc. in return for raw materials. The crux of the Etruscan problem, as it is so often called, is to decide whether the rise in the standard of living and the transformation from Villanovan to Etruscan is explained simply by trade or whether the new elements which have no obvious connexion with the earlier culture derive from foreigners settling in the country. Moreover, even if the archaeological evidence does not seem to demand a foreign invasion to explain the transformation of Etruria in the 8th and 7th centuries, many people believe that it is the only possible explanation of the deep-seated differences which exist between the historical Etruscans and the peoples inhabiting the rest of Italy, for the Etruscans lived lives, worshipped gods and spoke a language very different from that of their neighbours.

This problem of the formation of the Etruscan people is coloured by two conflicting ancient accounts of their origins which have formed the basis for all future discussion. Herodotus, the 5th century Greek historian, gives what is, apparently, the traditional foundation myth of the Etruscan people, that sometime after the Trojan Wars a body of Lydians under the leadership of Tyrrhenus left their own country and at length settled in the land of the Ombrioi 'where they built themselves cities and where they live to this very day'. This account deserves no more and no less credence than the story of Rome's foundation from Homeric Troy—perhaps a little more, in that Herodotus did not get it from Etruscan but from Lydian sources—but it was certainly believed by the Etruscans themselves and the ancients in general. Among Roman writers 'Lydian' or 'Maeonian' are the commonest adjectives for Etruscans; the Tiber is 'the Lydian river'. It was left to the learned and pedantic Dionysius of Halicarnassus, writing at the time of the Emperor Augustus, to state a reasoned case against the story; basing his argument upon a comparison of language, religion and customs, Dionysius set out to prove that the Etruscans were 'autochthonous' i.e. indigenous to Italy.

It seems certain that no solution of the Etruscan problem is possible in terms of a simple choice between the alternatives of Herodotus and Dionysius of Halicarnassus; nor can any modern theory, or ingenious modification of the ancient ones, such as that which would bring in a new people as invaders from the

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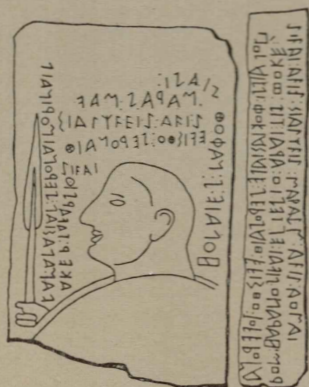
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north, be accepted as a total explanation of the Etruscans. At the present we can only ask questions. Does the orientalising phase in Etruria demand a foreign immigrating element to explain it? Are the regularly planned monumental tombs of this period a decisive argument for this because the construction of corbelled domes and vaults related to Minoan-Mycenaean methods of construction is not indigenous to Italy and quite unknown in the pure Villanovan phase? Do the tumulus-graves of Populonia and Vetulonia with their parallels in the coastal regions of Asia Minor confirm the Herodotean story?

Supporters of an eastern immigration into Etruria are now generally prepared to accept small groups of highly-organized colonists arriving, perhaps, at various periods in the 8th century; they can hardly claim more. Others believe that the period around 700 is too late to bring in the Etruscans and would argue for a much earlier immigration, some time during the Dark Ages of Mediterranean history (say between 1100 and 750). The Etruscans might then be the unpronounceable Twrws.w (Turusha?) who appear in 13th century Egyptian records among the sea-raiding peoples. There is hardly any archaeological evidence to support this theory although it has been suggested that some of the chamber tombs at Populonia with architectural analogies in Asia Minor as well as some of the imported objects found in the same place could be as early as 10th or 9th century BC.

An Alien Speech and Religion

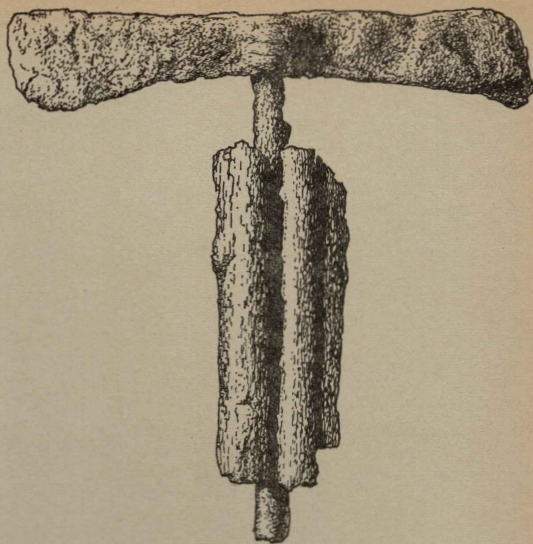
What sustains this enquiry into the origins of the Etruscans is, as we have seen, the difference in language, religion and other aspects of life between them and their neighbours. We shall return to their language and religious beliefs later but here we must consider briefly what evidence, if any, they contribute to the solution of the problem. Dionysius of Halicarnassus observed that the language was quite unlike the other ancient languages of Italy which, like Latin, are of the Indo-European



Inscribed funerary stele, 6th century BC, found on the island of Lemnos in the Aegean. The language, of which there are other examples, seems to be related to Etruscan. The link may be merely semantic, or it may be evidence for Etruscan migrations. (3)

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group. Linguists generally believe that Etruscan though it may have assimilated some Indo-European elements is basically a non-Indo-European tongue. The 'orientalists' have claimed some connexion between Etruscan and the 6th-century inscriptions in a pre-Greek dialect surviving on the island of Lemnos in the North Aegean and have argued that this fact supports an Etruscan immigration from Asia Minor. What precisely this connexion means is another matter; both Etruscan and Lemnian could be survivals of pre-Indo-European Mediterranean languages pushed into restricted areas by the Indo-European advance. Furthermore, Etruscan seems to have no obvious affinities with Lydian or any other languages of ancient Anatolia.



Iron fasces from Vetulonia, 7th century BC. The bundle of rods and the axe—symbols of authority—were later adopted by Roman magistrates. This example, the earliest known, is made of small hollow iron rods and a double-bladed axe (compare the axe in fig. 1); it disintegrated when moved but was put together again in the Archaeological Museum in Florence, where it now is. (4)

Religion is obviously an even more precarious argument than language in determining the 'origins' of a people but scholars have argued strongly for the 'oriental' alternative on the grounds that there are obvious oriental characteristics in the Etruscan religious beliefs and practices. The practices of hepatoscopy, the examination of the liver of sacrificial victims to discover the will of the gods, seem to have originated in Babylonia, but we cannot be sure that these practices about which we know, in the main, from late writers were original to the Etruscan religion or were derived from later contacts with oriental ideas by the processes of religious syncretism. A people as receptive to foreign ideas as the Etruscans, who certainly assimilated much of the religious mythology of the Greeks, might also have borrowed directly or indirectly from Chaldaean sources.

Most recently, the genetic evidence of the distribution of blood-groups in modern Tuscany and ancient Etruria compared with other parts of the Mediterranean world has been called upon to help solve the 'Etruscan problem'; if there is any possibility of progress in this field it will clearly depend upon much more extensive statistics than are as yet available. For the present we must allow that there are many questions still left unanswered about the process of the formation of the Etruscan people; it may be hoped that they will be answered when archaeology and field-work in Etruria have provided more evidence about the development of her cities and countryside from Villanovan, and even Bronze Age times, down to 600 BC. But finally it should be said that there are many who prefer to shelve the 'problem' altogether. Instead they look for unifying elements which make a homogenous culture from a mixture of tribal groups with different race and language; the Etruscan religious beliefs are one such element and the written language is another. To them Etruria means not a race but a culture, a language, a religion; it is not necessary to ask 'Who were the Etruscans?'.

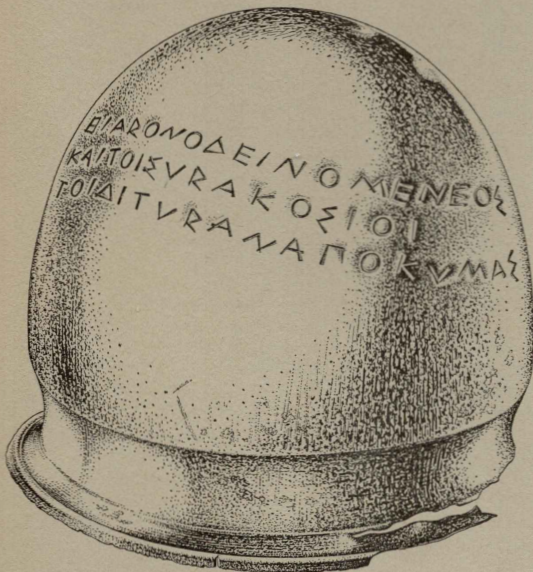
The Rise of Etruscan Power

Turning from the problems of her early development, we may now look at Etruria during the 6th century BC, the period of her greatest power and influence. The developments of the 7th century had seen the creation of a number of independent

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city-states ruling surrounding territories of varying size. In their earliest contacts with the Greeks the Etruscans seem to have won the reputation of being piratical seafarers; their maritime interests developed rapidly from 700 onwards and in the 6th century Etruscan sea-power, in alliance with the Carthaginians, could more than hold its own against the Greek colonists of the southern part of the peninsula. From a very early period the Greeks found in Etruria an important outlet for trade and a source of valuable materials. Their relations with several Etruscan cities were very good and many Greeks settled in Etruria to carry on trade. A Greek trading post was later established at Spina on the Adriatic and there was always a large Greek element in the population of Caere whose port, Pyrgi, had a Greek name; Caere also had a treasury in the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi. The Etruscans, at the height of their prosperity, also traded widely beyond the Alps and with the Carthaginians with whom they were often in alliance to protect common commercial interests; this alliance led inevitably to clashes with the Greeks.

In the course of the 6th century the Etruscans were able to extend their sphere of influence over a very large part of Italy and one ancient writer goes so far as to say that 'almost the whole of Italy had been under Etruscan rule'. How this Etruscan territorial expansion was achieved we do not know; our authorities suggest the existence of a league of twelve principal cities but we know very little about the nature of the league or its composition. It is generally agreed that Caere, Veii, Tarquinia, Vulci, Volsinii, Clusium (Chiusi) and Vetulonia should be numbered among the twelve principal cities in the period of Etruscan power; other important cities, Arretium (Arezzo), Perugia (Perugia), Volterra, Populonia and Rusellae, were powers to be reckoned with at certain periods. We know that these cities met together to celebrate an annual festival of religious character but it is highly doubtful whether they ever combined their resources into a federation which could serve as the basis of Etruscan power; political and economic alliances between individual cities and groups of cities either for joint military action or colonization seem more likely to have been the mainspring of her brief and successful imperialism. But it is unlikely that the naval and military organization of the Etruscans was ever geared to maintaining successfully a territorial empire against aggressive enemies.



An Etruscan helmet, captured at the Battle of Cumae by Hieron of Syracuse, who dedicated it as a votive offering at Olympia in 474 BC. The inscription reads: 'Hieron, the son of Deinomenes, and the Syracusans; Tyrrhenian booty from Cumae to Zeus.' (5)

The Etruscan expansion outside Etruria proper took two main directions, southwards over Latium to Campania and, a good deal later (end of 6th century), north-eastwards over the Apennines into the valley of the Po. The high-water mark of Etruscan power came when she became mistress of Capua and Rome; the Etruscan domination of Rome, which was for some time the centre of an Etruscan monarchy, is recorded in legend and confirmed by archaeology. In Campania, Capua was the centre of Etruscan rule and at Pompeii inscriptions and architectural remains have been found that prove a period of Etruscan occupation. The expansion into the Po valley took place at the end of the 6th and early 5th century BC; as a result, several important centres of Etruscan influence sprang up, among them Felsina (Bologna), Mantua and Spina, a trading station established at the mouth of the Po. The Etruscan dominion in north Italy lasted hardly more than a century, but in the 5th century when the Etruscan hold over the southern colonies was being weakened, the northern cities seem to have enjoyed their greatest prosperity, until, about 400, they were overrun by the invading Gauls.

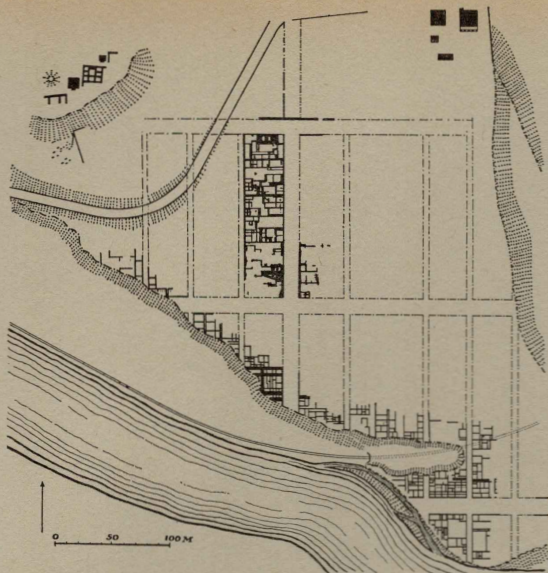
During the 5th century BC Etruscan power was generally on the wane. Early in the century Rome seems to have thrown off the Etruscan yoke by expelling the last of the Tarquins and so breaking down Etruria's land communications with Campania. The expansion of the Greeks and of Carthage provoked a serious economic crisis in Etruria; in 474 BC her sea-power suffered a severe blow in the Battle of Cumae when her ships in alliance with the Carthaginians were defeated by the Greeks led by Hieron of Syracuse. The Etruscans seem to have been expelled from Capua some time between 445 and 425 and by the end of the century their domination of the Po valley was collapsing under attacks from the Gauls. At the same time, Rome was undermining Etruscan power in central Italy; when Veii fell in 396, the Etruscans, already heavily engaged in the north, were unable to muster effective resistance. The last Roman triumph over Etruscans is recorded in 281 BC and very shortly afterwards Rome planted her first military colony, Cosa, a permanent symbol of her authority over Etruscan territory.

The collapse of her Empire seems to have broken the spirit of Etruria. While later Greek and Roman impressions of Etruscan life give us a picture of decadent loose-living that is probably without justification, many have noted how the lively spirit and joyous good humour of painted tombs at Tarquinia in the 6th and early 5th centuries gave place in the 4th and 3rd centuries to an atmosphere of despair that seems to reflect Etruria's fall from greatness.

Cities and City-life

The kind of city-state that the Etruscans introduced to central Italy was very close to the Greek pattern, each city being the hub of its surrounding territory. The earliest form of Etruscan government seems to have been a monarchy, the external symbols of which—the golden crown, the sceptre, the throne etc.—survived in the regalia of the Roman magistracies. Later, the monarchy seems to have been replaced by oligarchically elected magistrates; although we know the names of some of the magistrates—the *zilath*, who is found in many Etruscan cities and the *maru* are two of them—we can say nothing of their functions nor of the political history of individual cities. Wealth was no doubt concentrated in the hands of the aristocracy especially in those cities of southern Etruria who owed their prosperity to agriculture. In the industrial cities such as Populonia where the iron of Elba was smelted we must suppose a class of wealthy businessmen concerned with its manufacture and export. In addition there must have been a large free working population, colonies of resident aliens, especially Greeks, and a heavy slave population.

The basis of Etruscan life was the economic prosperity of the country. Apart from the production of iron and copper, several of the cities manufactured bronze objects which, from their consistently high quality, were in constant demand abroad; Vulci produced its tripods, candelabra and weapons, Perugia tripods and wrought iron all of which were exported widely. But the Etruscans were primarily an agricultural people; Etruscan



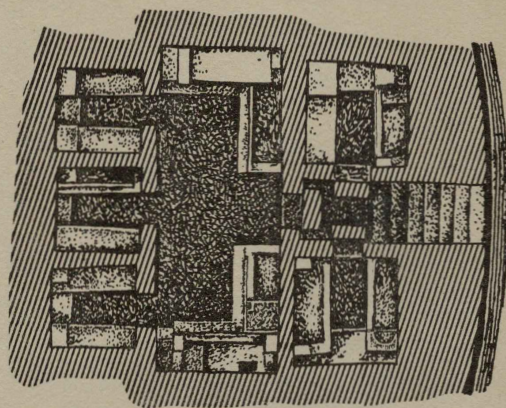
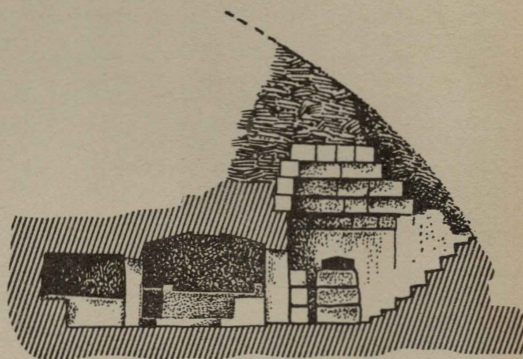
An Etruscan town now in process of excavation: Marzabotto, only 15 miles from the great city of Felsina (Bologna). The site is being eaten away by the River Reno and has also been disturbed by a modern road and railway, but enough remains to make it the best example so far discovered of Etruscan town-planning. On a height in the north-western corner was the 'Acropolis' (apparently not a defensive position) with temples and altars. The rest of the town was laid out on a checker-board pattern, with long rectangular 'insulae', a scheme later taken over by the Romans. (6)

corn is frequently referred to and wines and olives from Etruria were renowned then as they are today. The administration of individual cities was able to tackle considerable works of land reclamation and drainage; the Maremma, the coastal region of southern Etruria, a malarial swamp till a few years ago, seems to have been well-drained and fruitful under Etruscan rule and the drainage of the Po valley is specifically referred to by ancient writers as an Etruscan achievement. Some remarkable evidence of Etruscan land-drainage has survived in the country round Veii and elsewhere in southern Etruria.

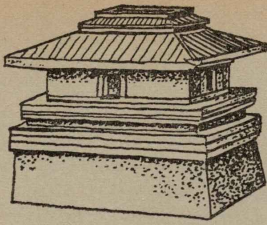
The sites on which the Etruscans chose to live were easily defensible and in their earlier period were without artificial defences except ditches and banks at the weaker points. The size of the cities may be judged by the fact that the later walls of Perugia have a perimeter of 7.3 km. and Veii and Tarquinia of about 8 km. These walls, of solid ashlar masonry, are generally not earlier than about 400 BC, the walls of Veii seem to have been built not long before the destruction of the city. The monumental arched gates and architectural façades are even later and designed under the influence of Hellenistic architectural ideas. Of the internal layout of the cities very little is known since none of the important cities has been extensively excavated. Most of them must have grown up in a haphazard manner from Villanovan beginnings. What little is known of the arrangement of the houses and streets does nothing to confirm the conception of a city laid out in accordance with the rigid rules of Etruscan religious ritual. Vetulonia has no obviously regular plan; only the later city foundations outside Etruria proper illustrate some of the methods of axial planning that are usually associated with the name of the Etruscans. Marzabotto, a small Etruscan town near Bologna has a principal street crossed by subsidiary streets in a strictly formal plan. These streets were well-paved and furnished with stepping stones; the principal one is extremely wide, as much as 15 m. in one place. At Marzabotto as elsewhere, there is ample evidence of an efficient system of street drainage.

The houses were of brick, stone or timber; very commonly the

foundations would be of stone and the superstructure of timber or mud brick. The basic form of Etruscan house was rectangular, consisting, perhaps, of a single room partitioned in various ways. We may also discover something of the design of the more elaborately planned dwellings of the wealthy because the Etruscan conception of the tomb as the house of the dead has left us a number of large family vaults, such as the Tomb of the Volumnii at Perugia, which probably preserve something of the characteristic layout of the wealthier private house. A typical plan has a large central chamber with three rooms opening off the far end and approached on the opposite side by a corridor with two flanking rooms. The central chamber would correspond with the *atrium* of a Roman private house and indeed one method of roofing the later *atrium* with an inward tilt in all directions, the so-called *atrium tuscanicum*, is specifically attributed to Etruria by the Roman architect, Vitruvius. No evidence has been found for this form in Etruria but the central opening with the roof sloping down from it may be seen on a house-urn from Chiusi; it serves to give both ventilation and light. Some of the internal arrangements are also known from tombs, especially those at Caere where details of ceiling construction, doors, windows, and even furniture are carved in stone; best known



Plan and section of the 'Tomb of the Greek Vases' in Tumulus II at Caere (5th century BC), showing how Etruscan tombs imitated the layout of private houses. Tumulus II contains four separate tombs, each with its own entrance, burrowing into the circular mound from different directions. They were cut into the solid rock (diagonal shading) and the earth heaped up over them. This one consists of a descending entrance passage, flanked by two small rooms; a main chamber, corresponding to the *atrium* of the house, with funerary couches around three walls; and three small cubicles opening off the fourth. The dead lay on real wooden beds placed on top of the stone ones. (7, 8)



Funerary urn from Chiusi in the shape of a house on a high podium. The central space (atrium) was open to the sky, with the rooms of the house opening off from it—a plan copied by the Romans. (9)

pl 18

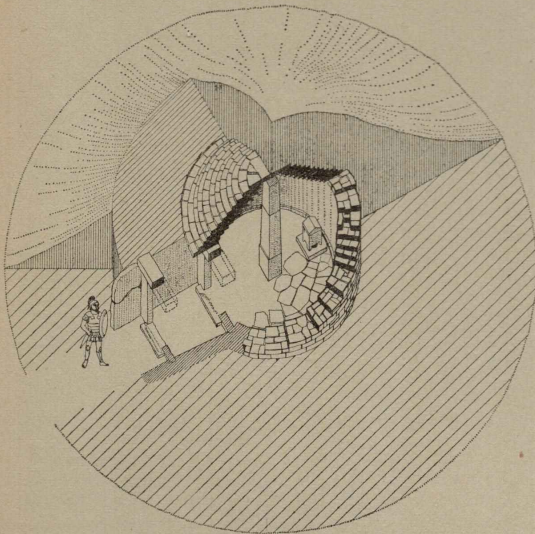
of all these interiors is the so-called Tomb of the Reliefs at Caere with its coffered ceiling and representations of everyday objects modelled with remarkable realism in stucco.

A Buried World: Tombs and Tomb-paintings

From Etruscan tombs we draw much more than our knowledge of Etruscan domestic architecture for they are almost our only source for reconstructing the life of the people, designed as they are to be the centre of an enhanced life after death. These tombs generally line the roads that led out of the Etruscan cities or were grouped into necropolises in the surrounding country. The roads which provided direct communication between neighbouring cities are often considerable works of engineering; deep road cuttings were made for the roads out of Veii, stone and timber bridges carried them over mountain streams, and tunnels were excavated through stubborn rock. At Caere (Cerveteri) some of the road cuttings are honeycombed with tomb-chambers. The forms of Etruscan sepulchres varied from place to place according to the building materials available and to local differences of taste. In regions where the hills are of soft volcanic tufa, as they are for example round Caere, chamber tombs are cut into the solid rock and surmounted by an earthen tumulus.

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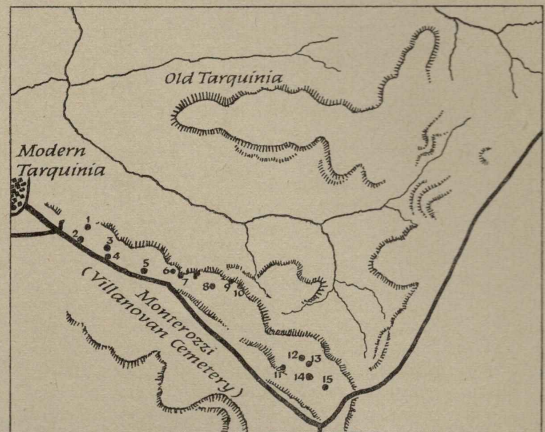
In other places, for example Populonia, the tombs are built up from ground level and vaulted over, with a tumulus of earth to cover them. In the country around Viterbo, at Norchia and Castel



The Casal Marittima tomb, Volterra, now re-erected in the garden of the Archaeological Museum at Florence. The vault is of the corbel type, with layers of stones overlapping each other. The central pillar reaches up to the centre of the vaulting but does not actually support anything. After it was built the whole tomb was covered with a mound of earth. (10)

d'Asso, the tombs are cut into the face of the rock and designed with elaborate architectural façades imitating houses or religious buildings.

The most precious legacy for our knowledge of Etruscan life and customs is the painted interiors of chamber-tombs at Tarquinia and elsewhere. At Tarquinia some 60 tombs with paintings have been found, of which about 20 may now be seen; 20 have come to light at Chiusi but only three survive. The Tarquinian series ranges in date from the mid-6th century to the Hellenistic period; the prevailing technique is that of fresco on a layer of plaster or of clay and limewash.

pl 17
27
f 11

Tarquinia, ancient and modern, showing the position of the most famous painted tombs: 1. Tomb of the Lionesses; 2. Tomb of Hunting and Fishing; 3. Tomb of the Triclinium; 4. Tomb of the Leopards; 5. Tomb of the Typhon; 6. Tomb of the Shields; 7. Tomb of the Cardinal; 8. Tomb of Orcus; 9. Tomb of the Painted Vases; 10. Tomb of the Old Man; 11. Tomb of the Chariot; 12. Tomb of the Baron; 13. Tomb of the Bulls; 14. Tomb of the Olympic Games; 15. Tomb of the Augurs. The Etruscan town stood on the opposite side of the valley from the necropolis, the normal practice. Even older burial places lie in the vicinity, the largest being the Villanovan cemetery of Monterozzi. (11)

A few of the subjects are taken from Greek mythology. In the Tomb of the Bulls, one of the earliest of the Tarquinian series, Achilles is lying in wait for the Trojan prince Troilus as he comes to water his horses. But the majority of paintings, from the late 6th century onwards, illustrate scenes of Etruscan life and customs. The back wall of the Tomb of the Augurs shows two mourners at the door of the tomb; on one side wall a brutal and bloody contest between a man and a dog, which reminds us of the Etruscan connexion with the gladiatorial games of Rome, is part of the funeral games in honour of the dead. On the back wall of the Tomb of the Leopards a lively banquet scene shows us the lordly Etruscans freely indulging in the delights of wine and love to an accompaniment of music and dancing which they so much enjoyed. Husband and wife dine together, a custom which shocked the Greeks and reflected the important position held by Etruscan women in both private and public life.

pl 17

pl 19
22

The paintings of the Tomb of Hunting and Fishing show us other pleasures the Etruscans enjoyed during life; so, too, do the paintings of a tomb recently discovered in the Monterozzi Cemetery at Tarquinia. Boxing contests, races of two-horse chariots, discus-throwing, jumping and foot-races are depicted and the tomb was christened the Tomb of the Olympic Games. The nobles of Etruria were famous for their horses and chariot teams; one peculiarly Etruscan game was the so-called Trojan Game, later adopted by the Romans, which seems to have been a horse-race over a maze-shaped course.

pl 23

pl 24

pl 26

Although the scenes of mourning remind us of the essential purpose of the paintings, the early paintings usually strike a joyful note of the pleasures of life and hopes for the future. In the later tombs the mood changes. The fearsome demons, Charun and Tuchulcha, in the Tomb of Orcus, the burial place of an aristocratic Tarquinian family, are among the sinister underworld beings that we meet with increasing frequency in the later paintings. Cruelty and despair, even terror about the future life dominate many of the painted scenes.

'Disciplina Etrusca': the Worship of the Gods

This development of Etruscan views about the after-life is one of the few aspects of Etruscan religion for which we have the evidence of the Etruscans themselves; for the rest of their religious beliefs we depend very largely upon non-Etruscan sources drawing upon an Etruscan religious literature that is now lost. The community of widely held religious beliefs kept the Etruscan federation together and the religious league lasted long into the Roman Empire. An annual meeting took place at the shrine of Voltumna, an unidentified place in the territory of Volsinii; its chief business was the election of a high-priest who was to hold office for one year but it also provided the opportunity for exchange of ideas and discussion of matters of common interest. We cannot doubt the truth of the remark of Livy, the Roman historian, who tells us that the Etruscans were 'a race, above all others, devoted to religious beliefs and ceremonies, all the more so because it excelled in the art of their observance'.

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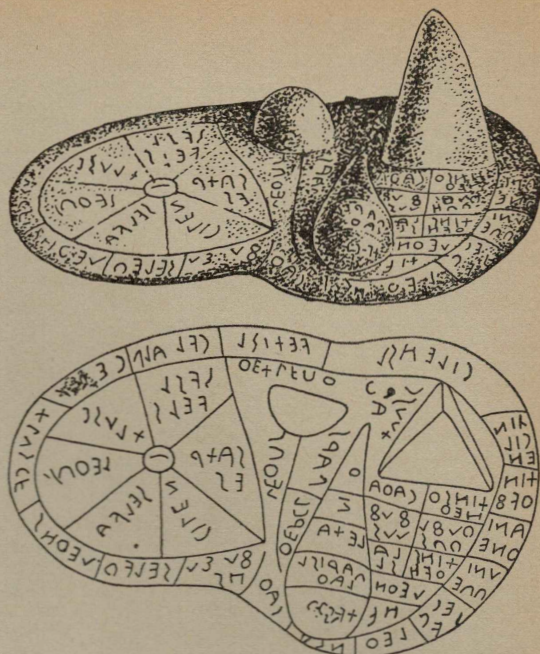
The gods of Etruria were many and various. Some were purely Etruscan as we may judge from the names that have come down to us; others were Greek or thoroughly conflated with Greek gods. The chief deity was Tinia, of infinite power, associated with Uni (Juno) and Menrva (Minerva) in a triad which was also worshipped on the Capitol of Rome. Among the lesser divinities some, like Nethuns (Neptune) have Greek names; others like the goddess Turan, Etruscan. Pantheistic religions always extend hospitality to foreign gods but the identification of so many local Etruscan deities with Greek gods is a surprising phenomenon. It is due, perhaps, as much to the influence of Greek art, which first gave the Etruscan divinities visual form, as to the direct influence of Greek religion. Many of the gods who take on Greek physiognomy and were given Greek names probably retained their own characteristics while many others were never assimilated to the forms of Greek anthropomorphism. Tinia, though in form he is sometimes indistinguishable from the Greek Zeus, has quite different powers; conversely, the Greek myths of the gods which play so big a rôle in Etruscan art are often only half-understood by the artists who depict them.

pl 14

The fundamental differences between Etruscan and Greek religion are most obvious in the ritual that accompanied the worship of the gods, the so-called *Disciplina Etrusca* about which we know a good deal from Roman sources. Our knowledge of the Etruscan ritual books comes from quotations and references in Roman works dating from the 1st century BC and later; the books themselves may not have been codified much earlier than this but, traditionally, they constitute a body of knowledge revealed to the Etruscan people by Tages, grandson of Tinia, greatest of all the Gods. We learn that the principal sections were rules concerning hepatoscopy or divination by means of the liver of sacrificial victims, the rules of divination from lightning and, lastly, the rules governing other aspects of behaviour and daily life and the methods of discovering the intentions of the gods concerning them.

pl 15

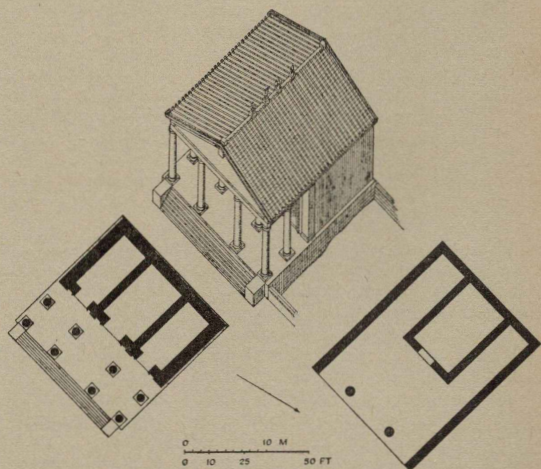
These practices were carried out in Etruria by the so-called *Haruspices* who could recognize and interpret the will of the gods, and long after the decline of Etruscan nationality the Etruscan *Haruspex* in the retinue of Roman generals and emperors continued to wield influence in the course of Roman history and institutions. The Romans held it essential, for example, to be skilled in the rules of the Etruscan discipline when planning a city. From direct Etruscan sources comes an interesting document of the practices of hepatoscopy in Etruria; the bronze model of a liver found in 1878 near Piacenza is marked out in sections—40 in all—corresponding to the Etruscan divisions of



Bronze image of a liver from Piacenza, probably used as a model for instruction in divination. Its upper surface is divided into forty sections, each with the name of a god or goddess inscribed on it, corresponding to a division of the sky. (12, 13)

the sky, each of which is inscribed with the name of an Etruscan god. It is usually thought of as a kind of text-book for *Haruspices*.

Dominating the domestic architecture of Etruscan cities were the sanctuaries and temples of the gods. An Etruscan sanctuary included an altar and a temple building to contain the cult-statue of the god. The Etruscan temple, unlike the Greek, was not transformed from wooden origins into a monumental stone



Two types of Etruscan temples: Veii (left) with three parallel chambers and Fiesole (right) with a single chamber and flanking corridors. The reconstruction of the Veii temple is only conjectural. Etruscan temples, unlike Greek, were made of wood with facings of terracotta slabs. (14, 15)

f 12
13

f 14

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pl 49

pl 51

pl 16

f 16

construction; the walls might be stone and mudbrick but most of the superstructure continued to be of wood protected by facings of terracotta slabs. Vitruvius, who has much to say in his academic way about 'Tuscan architecture' assigns to Etruria the origin of the temple with a cella divided into three parallel chambers or with a single chamber and flanking corridors. The basic Etruscan temple plan seems to have consisted of a broad cella fronted by a row of timber columns of wide span. In the temples at Fiesole and the Portonaccio site at Veii we seem to have examples of the second of Vitruvius' two arrangements with a narrower cella and flanking corridors.

The architectural details developed very little. Columns were unfluted with capitals derived from early forms of Greek Doric; another common form of capital in Etruria is related to the Aeolic form which many believe to be the ancestor of Ionic. In Hellenistic times the Greek forms of Doric, Ionic and Corinthian seem to have been introduced into Etruscan architecture. The terracotta facings of the timbers—frieze slabs, raised gutters, acroteria and antefixes—which are among the most characteristic products of Etruscan craftsmanship were richly modelled and gaily decorated in paint. Many of the free-standing acroterial figures and pedimental compositions are included among the unquestioned masterpieces of Etruscan art; the acroterial figures from the Portonaccio temple at Veii and the 5th century pedimental figures recently discovered at Pyrgi, the port of Caere, are some of the finest pieces. The Veii figures of about 500 BC have been associated with Vulca, the sculptor of Veii who, we are told, was brought in by the Romans to make the cult-statue of the Capitoline Jupiter; artists of his school were responsible for other parts of the decoration.

The Mystery of the Etruscan Language

It has already been remarked that Etruscan literature seems to have been almost entirely religious in character; we have references besides to historical, medical and dramatic literature none of which is probably any great loss to us. In fact, the longest Etruscan text that has come down to us is a linen roll which by some curious chance was used to wrap a mummy in Alexandria and is now in the Museum at Zagreb. It contains about 1500 words among which may be recognized the names of many Etruscan gods, and it seems to have been a ritual calendar; a similar ritualistic roll is shown in the hands of a certain Laris Pulena on the lid of a 2nd century sarcophagus from Tarquinia. Laris Pulena seems to have been the author of books on divination and held high office in Tarquinia; of the 60 words inscribed on his roll, 22 also occur on the mummy-wrapping in Zagreb.

Although we can recognize the meaning of many words, we cannot translate the texts of the Zagreb wrapping, the Pulena roll and the few other long Etruscan inscriptions, and it is a matter of great surprise to non-specialists in the field of Etruscology that this state of affairs prevails today. The truth is that up to the present our knowledge of the grammar and vocabulary of Etruscan remains comparatively slight. The main difficulty has been the lack of lengthy texts; with few exceptions among the many thousands found over large parts of Italy, the inscriptions are short, funerary in character and largely repetitive. They can be read easily since the Etruscan alphabet now presents no problems; it consisted originally of 26 letters derived from the Greek and was usually written from right to left. Later this alphabet was modified to suit the special needs of Etruscan. The earliest writing seems to belong to about the middle of the 7th century BC, perhaps as early as 700 BC.

The short funerary inscriptions, for many of which there exist Latin bilinguals, can very often be translated, but the knowledge of Etruscan syntax that is obtained from them is too slight to give much help with longer texts. Only a long bilingual text could provide a rapid solution to the problem; all attempts to relate Etruscan with other known languages have been unsuccessful and we are left with the laborious process of internal comparison of the various texts, a process by which the meanings of words and the formation of grammatical endings are won with the utmost difficulty. Here we can do no more than summarize very briefly what is at present known about the Etruscan language.

Some 30 or 40 words are known to us from Latin and Greek literary sources and they include, for example, the names of the months. By what is known as the combinatory method, the study and comparison, that is to say, of the formulae used in votive and funerary inscriptions, we have acquired a knowledge of several words expressing family relationships and a number of highly probable meanings for various verbs. We know the Etruscan names for many of their gods and also, from the inscriptions accompanying the scenes engraved on bronze mirrors, their versions of many Greek names. From the famous dice found at Tuscania now in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, we get the names for the numbers 1-6, but, tantalisingly, we cannot be sure which is which. Some grammatical endings of nouns and verbs seem quite certain—the form of the genitive singular, for example, and the past and present tenses of some verbs.

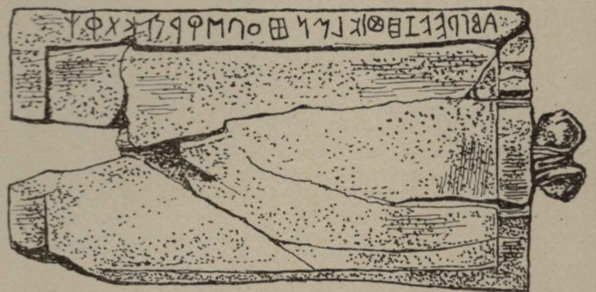
The total achievement is the ability to translate short funerary and dedicatory inscriptions with a fair degree of accuracy. A typical one, of some length, may serve as an example; it is to be found on the walls of the Golini Tomb at Orvieto and reads:

*vel lecatēs arnthiā rīna larāialisa(m?) clan velusum nefs marniū spurana
eprnec tenve meklum rasneās clevisinsl zilaxnve pulum rumitrine si
ma(12)ce clel lur*

It may be freely translated:

Vel Lecates, Arnth's brother, son of Larth and descendant of Vel. He held the offices of Maro Urbanus and Eprthe and was Zilath of the Etruscan people in Clusium.

In conclusion, it may be repeated that, so far, no convincing connection has been found between Etruscan and any other language; though it shares certain roots with neighbouring Indo-European languages in Italy it is generally excluded from the Indo-European group. Dionysius of Halicarnassus seems to have been right when he said that the Etruscans spoke a language unlike that of any other known people.



Ivory writing-tablet from Marsigliana d'Albegna, c. 650 BC. The inner surface was coated with wax, of which traces remain. On the rim is the Etruscan alphabet of twenty-six letters (written from right to left), evidently the scribe's model. (16)

A Rich Legacy in Art

The products of Etruscan craftsmanship maintained a consistent quality which made them highly-prized far beyond the bounds of Etruria; Etruscan mastery of bronze techniques is shown in chariots, helmets, candelabra and vases decorated either with engraving or extremely skilful embossing. Engraved bronze mirrors are an attractive and typically Etruscan group of products ranging in date from the 6th to the 3rd century BC; the subjects are generally taken from Greek mythology though some few are Etruscan. This art of engraving on metal came to quite astonishing fruition in the series of cylindrical or rectangular containers most of which seem to have been made at Praeneste, the outstanding example being the so-called Ficorini cista.

Small votive bronze figures have survived from all periods and

pl 35 they include several peculiarly Etruscan forms, among them a number of curious elongated figures. Of the many large-scale bronzes which are known to have adorned Etruscan cities very few have survived. Perhaps this is not surprising when we remember that 2000 statues were taken in the booty of Volsinii by the Romans in 264 BC and that throughout the Empire Etruscan 'objets d'art' were still highly prized by the connoisseurs.

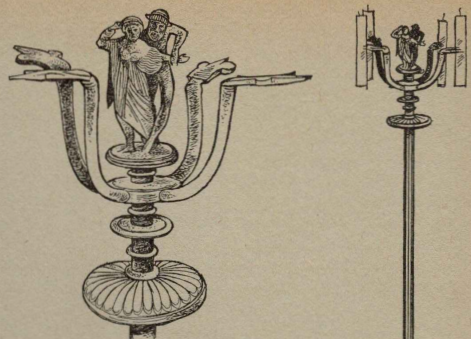
A very large output of stone carving and modelling was mainly religious and funerary in character. Sarcophagi, funerary urns and other kinds of funerary sculpture were worked in local materials in many Etruscan centres. We have the stone sarcophagi of Tarquinia, the terracotta sarcophagi of Caere, the cippi of Chiusi, illustrating funerary banquets and other funeral scenes, the Canopic urns and funerary figures of Chiusi and, in the Hellenistic period, the series of richly-sculptured funerary urns made of alabaster at Volterra, of limestone and terracotta at Chiusi and of limestone at Perugia. Terracotta workers throughout Etruscan times were occupied first and foremost with the decoration of religious buildings. Their work ranged from the simplest kind of low-relief plaque with repetitive scenes to the most grandiose pedimental composition involving difficult problems of modelling technique. They also made sarcophagi and small funerary urns for their private patrons.

The characteristic domestic pottery of Etruria is the ware known as bucchero, which develops from the typical Villanovan fabric generally known as *impasto*. This *impasto* is often made from coarse unpurified clay and is sometimes poorly fired; its successor is a bright black highly-polished ware produced by an extremely skilled process of firing; a red bucchero also exists but is less common. The early bucchero shapes are often very attractive; ornament is generally incised on them and follows an 'orientalising' repertory. In the 6th century the 'heavy' bucchero ornamented with reliefs of various kinds is much less attractive. The decline of bucchero is explained by the fact that the workshops were losing ground to imported Greek wares and painted Etruscan imitations.

Etruscan painted pottery from the very first copies Greek shapes and designs. Geometric wares of Greek derivation occur from about 700 BC onwards; copies of imported Protocorinthian and Corinthian vessels were made in the 7th and 6th centuries. Then about the middle of the 6th century a workshop in Caere began to produce black-figured pottery, the so-called Caeretan *hydriae*, in Ionian Greek style; these came, no doubt, from the workshop of an Ionian Greek who had emigrated to Etruria about 550 BC. The so-called 'Pontic vases', of which one of the best-known is an amphora in Munich with a Judgement of Paris scene, were made in some other Etruscan city, perhaps Vulci, a little later. Local production of a red-figured pottery in imitation of Greek began about 450 BC; it seems to have been made in several centres, among them Chiusi, Orvieto and Volterra.

The style in the 4th century is often very lively and refreshingly different from the mass of South Italian red-figure. The most ambitious red-figured vases made in central Italy are the so-called Faliscan vases—which are known to us mainly from finds made in tombs at Civita Castellana and were probably made there. These vases, closely related in style to Attic work of the period may well be the result of an immigration of Attic vase-painters into central Italy. Another important if short-lived branch of ceramics in Etruria is the relief-vases made in imitation of Hellenistic gold and silver vessels; they are sometimes gilded and silvered to complete the imitation and they were most probably produced in the area of Bolsena.

Among the finest products of Etruscan craftsmanship are the gold jewellery and other work in precious materials which attracted the talents of the best craftsmen in Etruria, especially in the archaic period. The wealthy lords and ladies of Etruria were buried in rich dress adorned with jewellery; other costly grave-goods, cups of gold and silver, ornaments of ivory and amber were set beside them. The gold ornaments often have details outlined or drawn in with tiny granules of gold soldered on to the surface, a technique in which the Etruscans achieved a high degree of mastery. The gold dress-pin from the Regolini



An Etruscan candelabrum, holding four candles, with a detail of the upper part showing a satyr carrying off a maenad. The high quality of the craftsmanship made Etruscan bronze-work prized all over the Mediterranean. (17, 18)

Galassi tomb at Caere, the gold cup of Greek shape from the Barnardini Tomb at Praeneste and the ivory cup from the Barberini Tomb, also at Praeneste, are outstanding works of this period in precious materials. After the 7th and 6th centuries there are very few objects of comparable quality although the tomb paintings continue to depict very considerable private riches.

The Debt to Greece

Every branch of Etruscan craftsmanship was dominated by the influence of the Greeks. Greek craftsmen had been resident in Etruria from an early period; it was the Corinthian Demaratus, according to one historical tradition, who first introduced artists into Etruria. As early as the middle of the 7th century BC, the Aristonothos who made the mixing-bowl found at Caere was a Greek. Immigrant Greeks must have made the so-called Caeretan *hydriae* and Greek inscriptions have been found on Etruscan painted vases and on the walls of tombs. In Campania the Greeks and Etruscans were for long neighbours and to the direct Greek influences we must add the vast quantity of imported Greek objects which served as models for Etruscan imitation. Yet despite this dominating Greek influence, it is hardly ever difficult to identify Etruscan from Greek work, not by reason of its inferiority but because it has clear independent characteristics.

It is only recently that unqualified praise has been given to Etruscan works of art. The fact is that every artistic achievement in Etruria can be recognized as more or less derivative from foreign sources. No continuous creative process seems to dictate its development; as M. Pallottino observes 'there is no continuity of artistic development but sudden forward leaps, long pauses, rapid and inspired adaptation of the very latest novelty from Greece...'. Etruscan artistic history is dictated by its reaction to contact with, firstly, the civilizations of the eastern Mediterranean and then with Greek art from its geometric to its Hellenistic phase. Throughout, the Etruscans maintained a high level of craftsmanship and every now and then their artists achieved something of the highest quality which lifted Etruscan art out of its derivative and provincial status.

The early influence of Greek geometric art was superseded by the 'orientalising' phase which is so well represented by the

pl 42

contents of such graves as the Regolini Galassi Tomb at Caere. This 'orientalising' did not act as in Greece, as a step in the process of creating a characteristically Etruscan representational art; instead, it gave way to new and clearly defined foreign influences and from 600 BC onwards Greek art was the source of inspiration for Etruscan artists. The Centaur from Vulci in the Villa Giulia Museum, Rome, is a work of this time; it is closely inspired by the so-called Dedalic style of sculpture in archaic Greece, yet it has none of the marks of inferior provincial work. Together with the well-known alabaster statuette from the Isis Tomb at Vulci, now in the British Museum, it can claim to represent an important and independent branch of the Dedalic tradition.

The Apollo of Veii was made at the end of the 6th century and it is probably the best known of all Etruscan terracotta sculptures. It is associated with the name of the only Etruscan artist that has come down to us, Vulca of Veii. Undeniably the Apollo owes elements of style to the Ionian school of Greece but when this is said we are left with a masterpiece of Etruscan art, constructed in a technique which the Greeks never mastered in the same way. The Apollo has rightly become one of the key-pieces for assessing the basically different qualities of Etruscan and Greek art; here we seem to have something in obvious contrast with Greek formulae, evidence of a strongly expressionistic art that is peculiarly Etruscan.

In the realm of painting, the Greek sources of inspiration are no less obvious. Some of the earliest examples like the plaques from the Campana Tomb at Veii are closely inspired by Greek vase-painting which, no doubt, provided models for the artists. The same source may well have served the artist who painted the scenes in the Tomb of the Bulls, the earliest of the Tarquinian series, but he has created a style which is essentially his own. In the paintings of the Tomb of the Triclinium the work has become so thoroughly Etruscan in character that its Greek sources recede entirely into the background. The artist has created something which is independent of its sources of inspiration. The same is true of the two magnificent animal bronzes, the famous Capitoline Wolf, a work of the late archaic period, and the Chimera from Arezzo, made in the 4th century BC, which are both to be reckoned as independent creations of brilliant sculptors and are justly admired as two of the finest bronzes that have come down to us from antiquity.

In the 5th century BC Etruscan art did not develop in the same way as art in Greece. The archaic conventions lingered on and very few terracottas and bronzes are directly inspired by the art of the later 5th century in Greece; exceptions are the terracotta figures from a temple at Orvieto which seem to reflect the Pheidias tradition in Attic art. But it was not until the late 4th century that Greek art again evoked a widespread and creative response in Italy. By this time Etruria was already giving way to Rome as mistress of central Italy and it seems that we should now speak of Etrusco-Italic rather than pure Etruscan art. Several non-Etruscan centres were now producing important work. The Latin city of Praeneste, home of the finely engraved *cistas* in Etruscan style had always been closely connected with Etruscan art, but it is significant that the finest of all the *cistas*, the

so-called Ficorini *cista*, was made in Rome, which was now becoming the most important city of central Italy and attracting artists from many places.

Yet much of the central Italian art of the Hellenistic period still belongs to the pure Etruscan tradition; such are the masterly terracotta figures inspired by the Praxitelean and Scopas traditions of Greek sculpture, like the outstanding Apollo from Civit  Castellana. One important aspect of later sculpture in central Italy, that of portraiture, seems to be both a response to the realism of later Greek sculpture and a positive expression of Italic taste. It is exemplified in the finest bronze heads and the humblest funerary portraits on stone and terracotta sarcophagi and funerary urns. The famous statue of the *Arringatore* in Florence was found near Lake Trasimene; it bears an Etruscan inscription but the man, with his Roman dress, seems to belong already to the series of portraits of Roman patricians in the last century BC.

The R le in History

The picture of a gay and pleasure-loving people that we get from many Etruscan tomb-paintings has an immense attraction for those who admire an apparently uninhibited and unambitious existence devoted to enjoyment. It is even used to explain the failure of the Etruscans: 'You cannot dance gaily to the double flute', says D. H. Lawrence, 'and at the same time conquer nations and rake in large sums of money.' But this picture of the Etruscans is surely quite false. They emerge in truth as highly successful managers of their natural resources, efficient businessmen, able to command a very high standard of technical production but lacking the qualities and perhaps the desire to maintain a position of power. Perhaps much is explained by the domination of a ritualistic religion that determined all the activities of everyday life and seems to have degenerated in later years into a morbid and fatalistic preoccupation with the future. To the Etruscan it seemed that religion, not circumstances, guided the course of history and, indeed, after the rapid flowering of Etruscan life in the 7th century and a period of imperialistic expansion in the 6th century, the rest of Etruscan history is a record of decline.

Yet the Etruscans played an immensely important r le in the history of Italy and indeed of our western civilization. The areas of the Italian peninsula that came directly under Etruscan control were considerable, but they were small in proportion to those affected by her influence; the life of the Ligurians, Umbrians, Picenes and Latins all contained a strong Etruscan element. It was the Etruscan who introduced the idea of the city-state in central Italy and transformed a village into a city civilization. We owe to the Etruscans the diffusion of writing by means of the alphabet they had themselves borrowed from the Greeks. The special debt of Rome to Etruria lies deep-rooted in all her achievements; her direct borrowings include elements of military organization, the ceremonial and regalia of her public life, many aspects of her art and religion. The civilization of Rome was founded on Etrusco-Italic beginnings and famous Romans like Maecenas, who counted among his ancestors the nobility of Etruria, could take pride when they saw Rome's Etruscan past reflected in every part of her private and public life.



The very magnificence and profusion of Etruscan remains

make their mystery the more tantalizing. Their cities, industries, trade and cultural contacts have been traced. We could reproduce an Etruscan house and its contents, and the costumes of the people who lived in it, down to the smallest detail. And yet they remain baffling. For to some of the most intriguing questions that we ask of a great civilization the Etruscan returns no answer. There is no history, no literature, no proclamation or legal decree, no prayer to the gods. The thousands of brief inscriptions contain only conventional formulae, and the few texts of any length (the longest is 1500 words) continue to defeat all attempts at understanding.

That is one side of the Etruscan mystery: the other is the riddle of their origin. Herodotus says they came from Lydia in Asia Minor, yet their language is not Lydian, nor is it Indo-European, nor Semitic. They arose unheralded in the midst of a land barely civilized, flourished and grew powerful, creating an art rivalling

that of Greece, which inspired it, and a way of life that can still cast its spell on us. Then came Rome. The Etruscan cities, sophisticated, pleasure-loving and disunited, were conquered one by one. 'The ashes on the hearths of the Etruscans were scattered to the winds,' wrote Propertius. In a process of ruthless Romanization their political life was destroyed, their customs suppressed, their art looted, the key to their genius lost. So it has remained. From the painted walls of their tombs, from countless bronzes, terracottas and stone sculptures, the sad wide eyes of Etruscan men and women gaze out at the world, a faint smile on their silent lips, as if guarding their secret for ever.

A married couple reclining at a banquet—one of a number of terracotta sarcophagi showing the dead in this pose. It was made about 500 BC and comes from Caere. (1)



The houses of the living served as models for the urns that contained the ashes of the dead. This Villanovan cremation urn from Vetulonia is particularly interesting because it shows roof construction and decoration. (2)

Before the Etruscans

the land of Etruria was the home of an Iron Age people known as the Villanovans (from Villanova near Bologna), who seem to have come from across the Alps. They were skilful metal workers and potters and they passed much of their knowledge on to the Etruscans. They cremated their dead, burying the ashes in characteristic urns.



Art grew under the influence of Greece; even Villanovan works are clearly inspired by the Greek geometric style. This *askos* with its bull's head and armed rider, is from Bologna. (3)



A single handle to a Villanovan urn may mean that it was made to hold a cremation. If a two-handled urn was used, one of them was always ritually broken. The typical shape is biconical, with incised geometric ornament. The one on the left, from one of the largest Villanovan cemeteries of Tarquinia, has a real warrior's helmet as a lid, with a high crest and three spikes back and front. Below: a reconstructed cremation burial at Bologna, showing how it was enclosed in six stone slabs. (4, 5)





The rite of cremation continued much longer than elsewhere in Chiusi, the most important Etruscan city of the north. Peculiar to this region, where there was a specially large Villanovan settlement, are the 'canopic' urns. That shown above, c. 600 BC, has a body, lid (in the form of a human head) and 'seat' (with back), all of terracotta but imitating the details of metalwork. The urn on the right makes ornate use of oriental motifs. The two rims have griffin-heads and female statuettes, and the lid is surmounted by a large female figure in an attitude of prayer. (6, 7)



Life in the Po Valley under Etruscan occupation is vividly portrayed in a bronze situla with repoussé reliefs found near Bologna. In the zone shown below a funeral procession wends its way to

the tomb. The women, bearing offerings, wear hoods and mantles with a net-work pattern. The men here have wide-brimmed hats in the Greek style, but more usually they went bareheaded. (8)



Etruscan culture crystallizes

around 700 BC, whether by a natural development from the Villanovan or by foreign invasion is still a matter for argument—the central issue, in fact, of ‘the Etruscan problem.’ Many of the innovations point to the east, including corbelled vaults (Mycenae), and certain kinds of grave (Asia Minor). What chiefly distinguishes the new culture from the old is the eagerness with which it absorbs ideas from abroad. There is a rush of exotic imports—vases from Corinth, Egyptian faience, Urartian pottery-stands, Assyrian goldwork, Phoenician silver. This is the so-called ‘orientalizing’ period of Etruscan history, when the foundations of its greatness were laid.



Strong influence from the Eastern Mediterranean appears in this terracotta statuette of a woman from Caere. She wears a cloak fastened at the shoulder by a metal *fibula* and large massy ear-rings. The statuette dates from the 7th century BC. (9)



Trade with Egypt is suggested by the ‘Bocchoris’ vase (above) a faience vessel decorated with the cartouche of Pharaoh Bakenrenef who was killed in 728 BC. It shows the pharaoh between divinities, and prisoners and monkeys among palms. (10)

From Phoenicia comes this silver cauldron (below) imported into Etruria in the 7th century BC. The zones in low relief with engraved outlines show scenes of peace and war. The snakes’ heads fixed to the rim were probably added in Etruria. (11)





Etruscan luxury became a byword in the austere world of the early Romans. Even now the sight of their jewellery is breathtaking. There are necklaces, brooches, rings, bracelets and ornaments of every description. In 1836 the tomb of a prince and princess was opened at Caere. One of the richest pieces was a

golden clasp (top) in two sections—an oval plate with five lions, connected by two hinged joints to a smaller oval plate covered with minute golden ducklings. The fibula below is another example of the same repoussé and granulation technique, this time forming lions' heads, griffins and sphinxes. (12, 13)



One of the most curious features of Etruscan religion was hepatoscopy, or divination by examining the liver of sacrificial animals. On a model liver from Piacenza the different parts of the liver corresponded to different sectors of the sky. This is a custom of Eastern origin—it was practised in Babylon.

'Calchas', a bearded winged figure, pores over an animal liver which he holds in his hand. This engraving on the back of a mirror from Vulci dates from the 4th century BC. Calchas is the name of a Greek priest mentioned in the *Iliad*. (14)

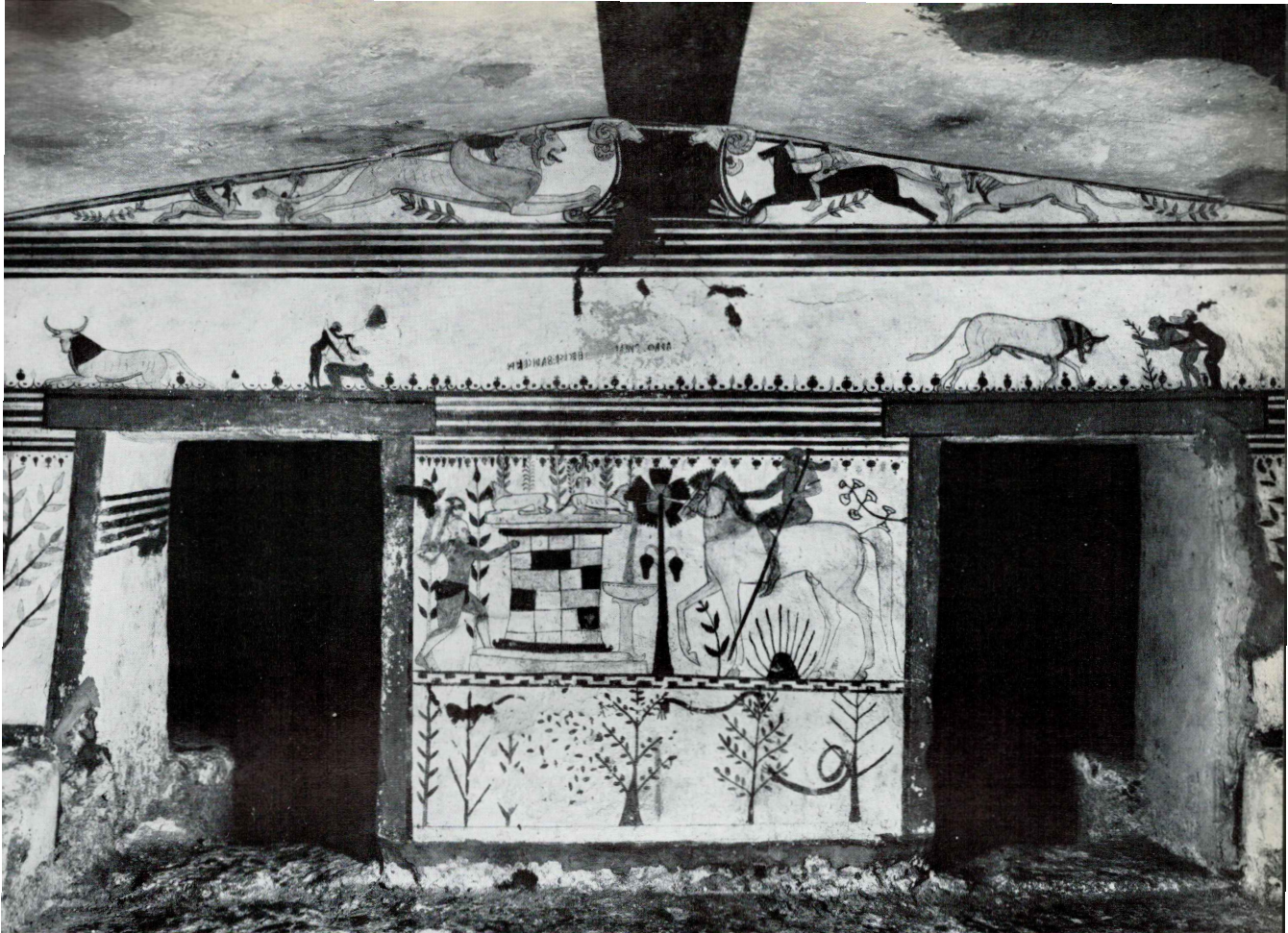


The **haruspex**, one skilled in interpreting the will of the gods, was an important person in Etruscan, and later in Roman, society. In the bronze (right) he wears the characteristic pointed beret and mantle, which has a short inscription. Besides hepatoscopy, the haruspex was also expected to interpret lightning and the flight of birds. (15)

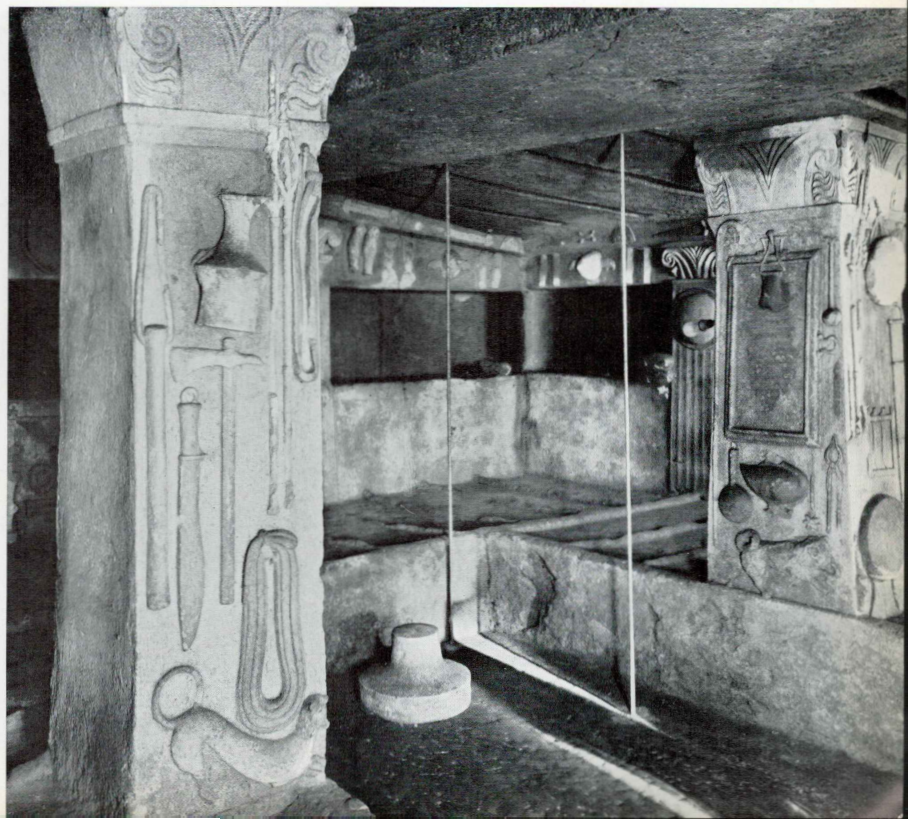


One of the longest surviving texts in the Etruscan language is on a scroll held by a reclining stone figure on a sarcophagus (a certain Laris Pulena of Tarquinia). The Etruscan alphabet was almost the same as the Greek, but normally written from right to

left. The scroll shown here contains sixty words; part of it describes the genealogy and career of the dead man, and the names of some Etruscan gods can be recognised, but the text as a whole cannot be understood. (16)



The Etruscan dead were given houses as costly and beautifully decorated as those of the living. The necropolis was a true 'city of death', often covering several square miles. The Tomb of the Bulls at Tarquinia (above) dates from the mid-6th century. One wall shows a scene from the Siege of Troy. Achilles, wearing a helmet, waits in ambush behind a fountain for Troilus who approaches riding on a huge horse. The amazing Tomb of the Reliefs at Caere (right) goes even further in reproducing an actual house-interior. There are imitation pillars and capitals, beams, joists and roof-planks, while all around are stucco reliefs of domestic utensils depicted in astonishing detail: on the nearest pillar a knife, pick, rope and an animal like a cat; on the further one pincers, cooking pots, a chicken and a pig. (17, 18)



It is at Tarquinia,

one of the greatest of the Etruscan city-states, that this dazzling world comes most vividly to life. Here was a hill-city, made rich by trade, the home of an aristocracy of taste and boundless energy. On the walls of their tombs the men of Tarquinia painted everything that was most precious in their lives—feasts, festivals, music, dancing, stories from the epic poets, the pleasures of the table and the hunt, of wine and of love. At the peak of Etruscan culture (5th century BC) these paintings glow with a radiant enjoyment of physical things that makes them unique in ancient art. At Tarquinia some sixty painted tombs have been found and more are still coming to light. They are hollowed into the rock, the surfaces smoothed and covered in a layer of plaster and limewash.

The banquet in the Tomb of the Leopards. Man and wife recline together, the women fair, the men brown-skinned. Naked boys serve the wine. 'The curves of their limbs show pleasure in life,' wrote D. H. Lawrence, 'a pleasure that goes deeper still in the limbs of the dancers, in the big, long hands thrown out and dancing to the very ends of the fingers, a dance that surges from within, like a current in the sea.' Below left: dancers from the Tomb of the Triclinium, drapery flying, the girl's head thrown back in ecstasy; yet all this energy is strictly composed, the figures being separated from each other by little trees, across which their hands barely touch. Below centre: a player on the double-flute—most typical of Etruscan musical instruments—in the Tomb of the Leopards. Below right: a woman from the Tomb of the Lionesses; she dances solemnly, her costly robes flowing gracefully around her. (19, 20, 21, 22)







An excursion by the sea is depicted on a wall of the Tomb of Hunting and Fishing (above). One boy with a net leans from the prow of a dolphin-headed boat. Another on a rock aims his sling at a water-bird. In the air flocks of gaily coloured birds flutter, filling the tomb with movement. (23)

Funeral games were a part of Etruscan, as of Greek, ritual. Below left: a racing chariot from the Tomb of the Olympic Games at Tarquinia, discovered only in 1958. Below right: a wrestling contest from a tomb at Chiusi. There were once twenty painted tombs at Chiusi, but only three survive. (24, 25)



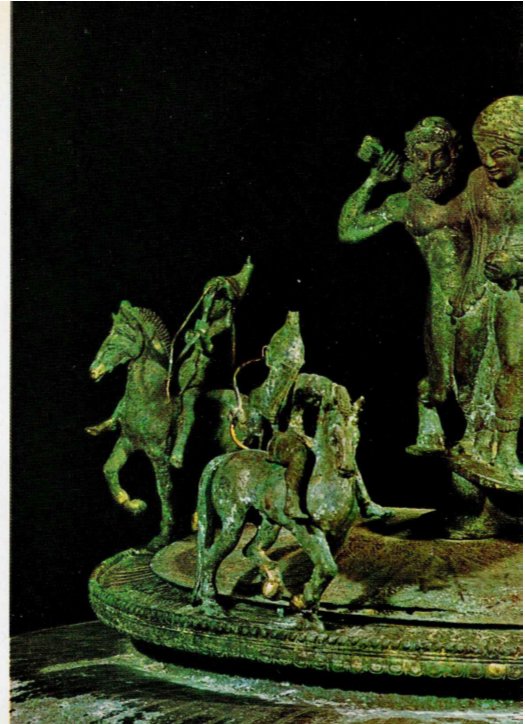
Towards the end of the 3rd century the scene begins to darken. The after-life ceases to be regarded as a prolongation of earthly pleasures and becomes a place of judgement. Dreadful gods menace the dead.

Grasping the hammer that symbolizes the blow of death, the daemon Charun advances threateningly in the Tomb of Orcus at Tarquinia. This sinister figure from the underworld shows the increasing terror of Etruscan religion. His nose is hooked, ears pointed; snakes writhe from his head and shoulders. (26)



Sad-eyed, their exuberant gaiety vanished, the Etruscans of the 3rd century sit at a melancholy banquet. The wife no longer leans happily against her husband, but sits upright. Like the man in the Tomb of the Leopards (pl. 19), he is handing her the egg, symbol of life, but now the future is without hope or joy. This painting is in the Tomb of the Shields, Tarquinia. (27)





Etruscan bronze-work, whether by Etruscans or by Greek craftsmen settled in Etruria, was prized all over the Mediterranean. On the lid of a cauldron from Capua (above right) a satyr carries off

a maenad, while four Amazons gallop round them shooting arrows. Above left: the handle of a *cista* from Praeneste; two warriors in armour carry the body of a third. (28, 29)

The Chimaera, perhaps the most famous of ancient bronzes, and one that caused a sensation when it was found at Arezzo in 1553. Benvenuto Cellini was given the job of restoring it (he mended

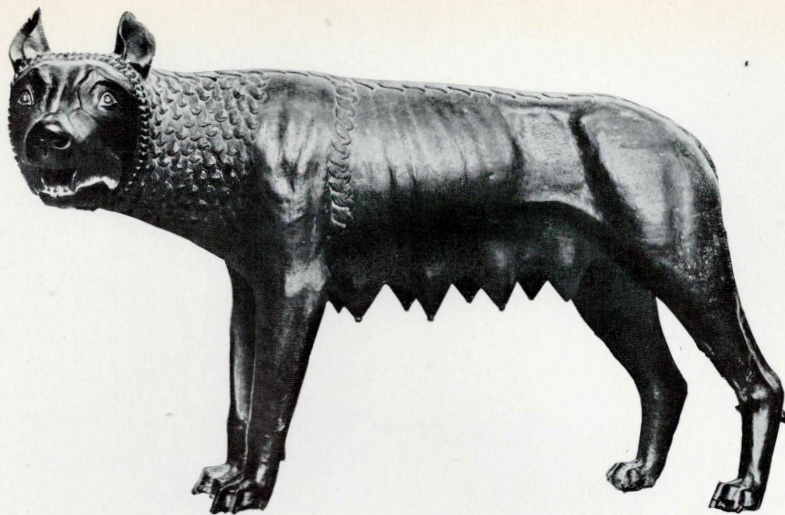
the serpent-tail). The mythical beast, with its lion's body and goat's head growing out of its back, digs its claws into the ground in frenzy, ready to leap at Bellerophon, the hero who slew it. (30)



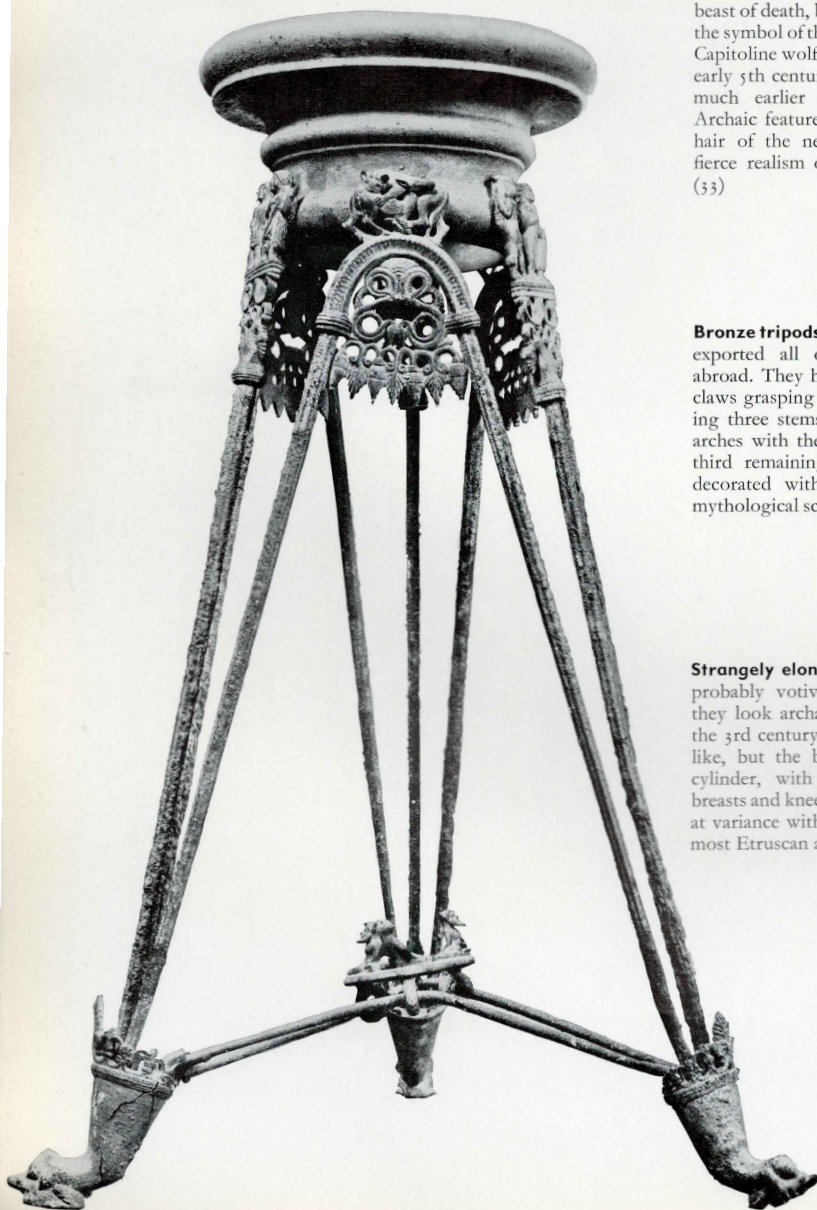


A masterpiece of bronzework is the Ficorini *cista*, typically Praenestine but made in Rome. The legs consist of groups in relief; the feet are claws resting on frogs; while the body is engraved with scenes from the story of the Argonauts—a youth practising boxing, Silenus imitating him, a lion-headed fountain, another youth drinking and a third holding an amphora already full. The detail above shows the Argo herself. (31, 32)





The she-wolf, to the Etruscans the beast of death, became for the Romans the symbol of their own greatness. The Capitoline wolf (above) dates from the early 5th century BC and is therefore much earlier than the Chimaera. Archaic features such as the stylized hair of the neck contrast with the fierce realism of the face and limbs. (33)



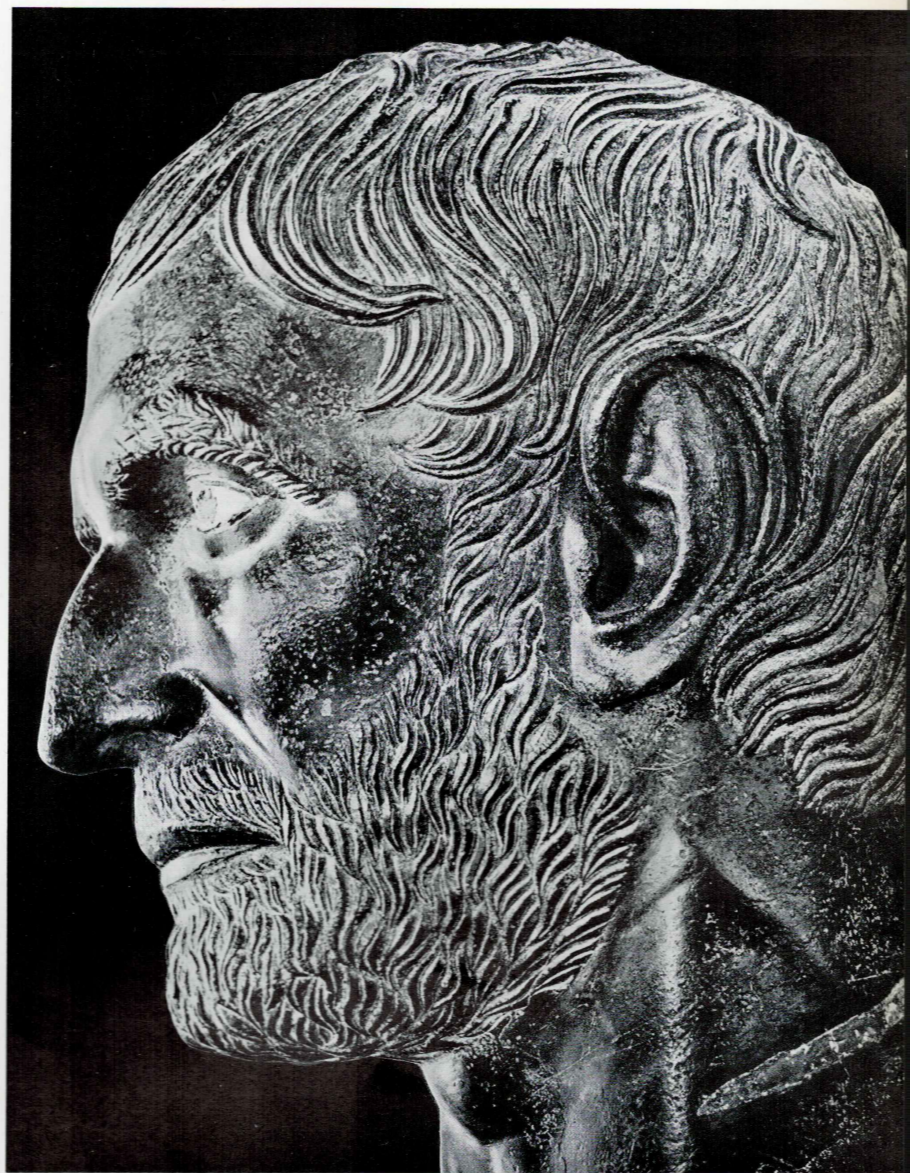
Bronze tripods from Vulci (left) were exported all over Italy and even abroad. They have three feet (animal claws grasping a frog), each supporting three stems, two of which form arches with the adjoining stems, the third remaining single. The top is decorated with animal groups and mythological scenes. (34)

Strangely elongated figurines were probably votive bronzes. Although they look archaic they are in fact of the 3rd century BC. The head is life-like, but the body is reduced to a cylinder, with tiny knobs for the breasts and knees—a convention quite at variance with the classical roots of most Etruscan art. (35)





A satyr defends himself against a snake—a small bronze that may have formed the support for a vase. A fragment of the snake remains in his left hand; in his right he grasps a dagger. The sculptor has devoted great attention to the expression of the face. (36)

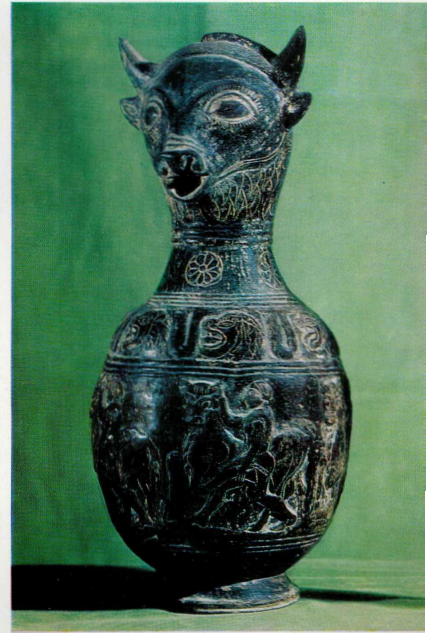


The Roman art of portraiture is foreshadowed in the bronze head known as 'Brutus'. It was probably made by an Etruscan craftsman for a Roman patron in the 2nd or 1st centuries BC. As realistic as later Roman busts, the face has a deep melancholy that links it with the last phase of Etruscan painting. (38)

As supports for candelabra the Etruscan bronze-smiths often made figures of enchanting vitality showing all their love of the human form in motion. This girl, dancing to the castanets, is a sister to those who dance at the funeral feasts in the painted tombs. (37)

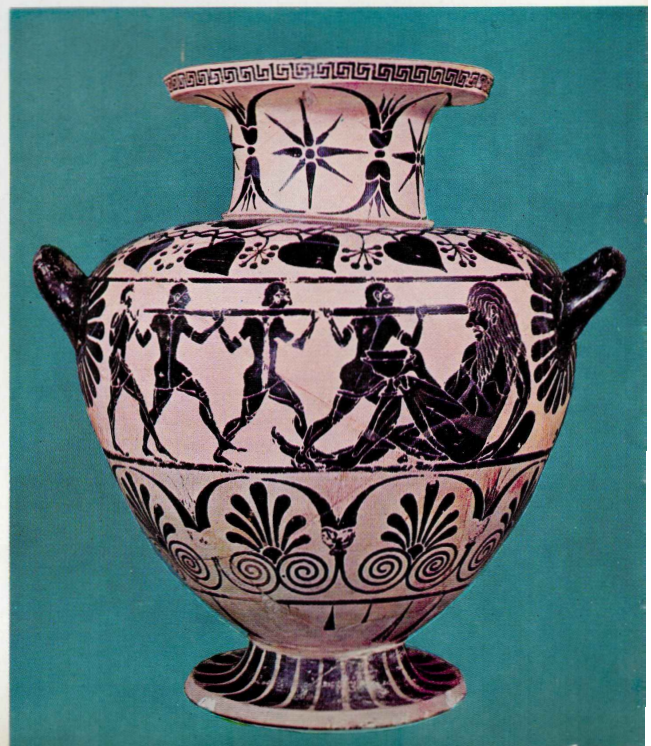
It is a surprising fact that of the painted pottery from Etruscan tombs, much more is of Greek than of local manufacture. And besides these imports from Greece, which must have been enormous, Greek potters settled in Etruria and began schools of their own. Throughout its development, therefore, Etruscan pottery shows a very close dependence on Greek models, though it is not difficult to tell one from another. The earliest native Etruscan

pottery is 'bucchero', a black, highly-polished ware deriving from a Villanovan type. Vessels are coarse but often attractive in shape, with incised ornament (below). Later bucchero ('bucchero pesante') shows a decline in face of competition from Greek workshops. The example from Chiusi (below right) has a bull's head at the top, and then a row of lion's heads and a zone showing a bull held by the horn and leg by an athlete. (39, 40)

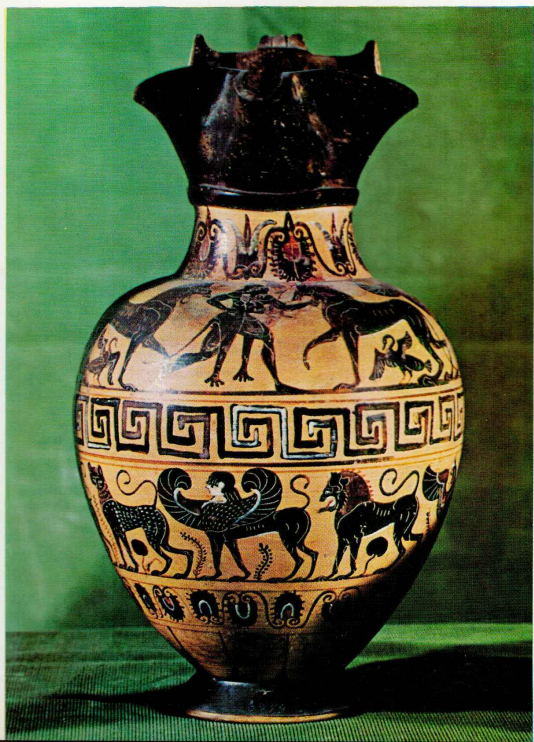


The earliest Greek style to be imitated is the geometric. This vase from Bisenzio (below) is painted in black and red on a white slip; the main decorative motifs are purely geometric, but there is a frieze of schematized dancing figures forming the lowest zone. It was made about 700 BC. (41)

About 550 BC a Greek potter from Ionia (Asia Minor) emigrated to Caere. There was still an unceasing demand for Greek pots. The new workshop prospered, and the black-figured 'Caeretan hydriae' are its characteristic products. On the vase below Odysseus and his companions put out the eye of Polyphemus. (42)



The finest Etruscan vases in red-figured technique are the Faliscan made during the 4th century BC in or near Falerii (Civita Castellana). The style is distinctively different from the Greek models on which they are based, and it is often possible to see that the artists did not understand their Greek subjects or treat them very seriously. This calyx-crater by the Nazzano painter depicts the sack of Troy. At the bottom old king Priam lies on the ground, a warrior standing threateningly over him. To the left Aphrodite (with shield) is defending Helen from the wrath of Menelaus. At the top Neoptolemus kills the boy Astyanax. (43)



'Pontic vases' are another class of black-figured vase ware which may have been produced by a Greek immigrant from Ionia. His workshop was probably at Vulci in the 6th century BC. The vase (left) is at Florence; on the shoulder is Hercules fighting two lions, at the bottom a frieze of mythological animals. (44)



Etruscan women kept scent or ointment in elegant little jugs like this, duck-shaped and decorated in red-figured technique. The flying goddess is a 'Lasa', a type of female Eros who belongs entirely to Etruscan mythology. (45)

The accident of survival

accounts for the relative rarity of large-scale Etruscan stone-carving and terracotta-work. Etruscan tombs have been preserved, the temples not. And it was in the temples that the most grandiose works were to be found. Besides housing the statues of the gods, they were decorated with elaborate terracotta plaques and pedimental compositions, while the roofs had rows of 'acroteria' and 'antefixes'.



Funeral games and the journey of the dead into the underworld in a chariot led by a daemon are shown on this tombstone from Bologna, dating from about 400 BC. (46)

Suffering and resignation show in the lined faces of this elderly Etruscan couple from a terracotta urn of the 1st century BC. The old optimism in the face of death has gone and in its place is a stoicism that bears the imprint of Rome. (48)



The Centaur of Vulci: a male body with the hind-quarters of a horse. The arms (missing from shoulder to wrist) were straight down at his side. When complete he would have been over three feet tall. The style is very close to the Greek 7th century tradition known as 'Dedalic'; several Etruscan carvings in this style made around 600 BC are fine works suggesting that they were made by Greek emigrants to Etruria. The Centaur once guarded the entrance to a tomb. (47)



Proud winged horses, yoked to the service of the gods—one of the few large pieces of terracotta to have survived, and a masterpiece of Etruscan art. They once formed part of the façade of a temple at Tarquinia and, apart from the wing and the tail, seem to have been modelled in one piece. (49)



The lady Seianti Thanunia of Chiusi raises her veil to look into the mirror. Her effigy in terracotta, painted to display her rich clothes and jewellery, dates from the mid-2nd century. (50)

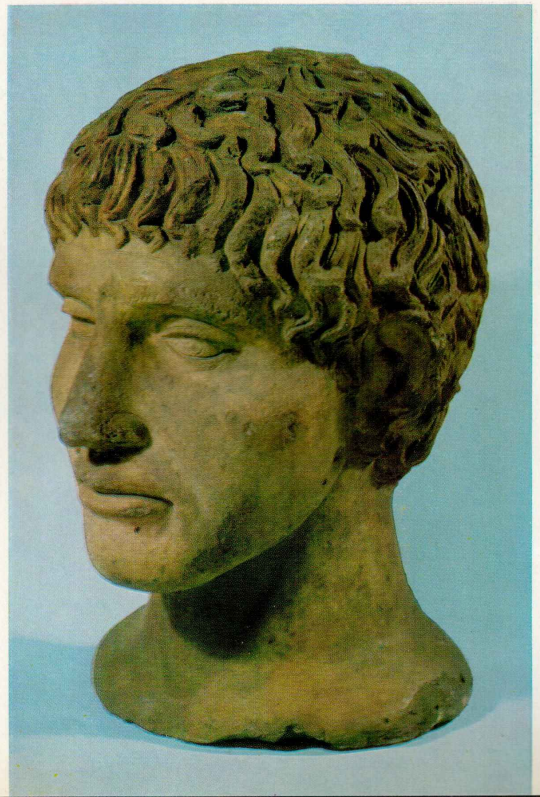


The Apollo of Veii is unmistakably Etruscan, a supreme masterpiece of terracotta sculpture that illustrates clearly the difference between Etruscan works of art and their Greek models. It is much earlier than the Apollo of Civit  Castellana, dating from about 500 BC. Part of a group representing the struggle between Apollo and Hercules, it once decorated the ridge of a temple-roof at Veii. This group is associated with the name of the artist Vulca of Veii who worked on the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitol in Rome. (51)

The gods of the Greeks were worshipped in Etruria, often with different attributes and different ritual, side by side with other deities whose strange names were unknown on Olympus—Tinia, of infinite power, Fufluns, Turan, Tesan, Sethlans. Apollo was one of the Greek pantheon to be taken over almost unchanged. The head of Apollo (below) from the pediment of a temple at Lo Scasato, Civit  Castellana, is close in style to the work of one of Lysippus' pupils. It dates from the 4th–3rd centuries BC when Greek influence in Etruria was at its height. (52)



A peasant of Etruria, as he was in life during the late 2nd or 1st century AD. The Etruscan love of direct vigorous portraiture comes out well in this votive terracotta head. (53)



Resources on the Etruscans

Wikipedia:

[Etruscan Civilization](#)

[Etruscan History](#)

[Etruscan Language](#)

[Etruscan/Etruscans/Etruria](#), Google search of Wikipedia

Google Images:

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[Etruscan/Etruscans/Etruria](#), Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

[Etruscan/Etruscans/Etruria](#), The Ancient World Online (AWOL)

[Etruscan/Etruscans/Etruria](#), Sacred-texts